



Recommendations for the Use of Antiretroviral Drugs in Pregnant Women with HIV Infection and Interventions to Reduce Perinatal HIV Transmission in the United States

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Pregnant Women Living with HIV Who Have Previously Received Antiretroviral Medications but Are Not Currently Receiving Any Antiretroviral Medications (Last updated December 24, 2019; last reviewed December 24, 2019)

Panel's Recommendations

- Obtain an accurate history of all prior antiretroviral (ARV) medications used for HIV treatment or prevention of HIV transmission, including virologic efficacy, the patient's tolerance of the medications, the results of prior resistance testing, and problems with adherence (**AIII**).
- Choose and initiate an antiretroviral therapy (ART) regimen based on results of prior resistance testing, prior ARV drug use, concurrent medical conditions, and current recommendations for ART in pregnancy (see [Table 5](#)) (**AII**).
- If HIV RNA is above the threshold for resistance testing (i.e., >500 to 1,000 copies/mL), ARV drug-resistance testing should be performed prior to starting an ARV drug regimen (see [Antiretroviral Drug Resistance and Resistance Testing in Pregnancy](#)) (**AIII**).
- ART should be initiated prior to receiving results of current ARV resistance assays. ART should be modified based on the results of the resistance assay, if necessary (**BIII**).
- If the ART regimen results in insufficient viral suppression, repeat resistance testing and assess other considerations, including adherence, food requirements, and drug interactions (**AII**).
- Consider consulting an HIV treatment specialist when choosing an ART regimen for women who previously received ARV drugs or modifying ART in those who are not fully suppressed (**BIII**).

Rating of Recommendations: A = Strong; B = Moderate; C = Optional

Rating of Evidence: I = One or more randomized trials with clinical outcomes and/or validated laboratory endpoints; II = One or more well-designed, nonrandomized trials or observational cohort studies with long-term clinical outcomes; III = Expert opinion

Pregnant women living with HIV who are currently not receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART) may have received antiretroviral (ARV) drugs in the past for their own health and/or prevention of perinatal **or sexual** HIV transmission. A small number of clinical trials and observational studies have generated information about the effectiveness of ART in individuals who previously received ART for prevention of perinatal transmission of HIV.¹⁻⁴

There has been concern that prior, time-limited use of ART during pregnancy to prevent perinatal transmission may lead to resistance and, thus, reduced efficacy if these ARV drugs are used as a part of subsequent ART regimens. Standard genotyping has shown that rates of resistance after time-limited use of ART appear to be low. **Resistance appears to be a concern primarily in patients who received time-limited non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor (NNRTI)-based therapy.**⁵⁻⁷ **In a comparison between 5,372 ARV-naïve pregnant women and 605 women who had previously received ART (but who were not being treated immediately prior to the current pregnancy), ARV-experienced women had a small, but statistically significant, increase in the risk of detectable viral load at delivery (adjusted odds ratio 1.27; 95% confidence interval, 1.01–1.60). However, this increased risk was only seen in women who previously received NNRTI-based therapy, and not in those who previously received protease inhibitor (PI)-based therapies.**⁵

Both standard and sensitive genotyping techniques appear to show a low rate of resistance to PIs after pregnancy-limited use of PI-based ART, but these results reflect assessments in a limited number of women.^{8,9} Increased risk of treatment failure has not been demonstrated with re-initiation of ART following reinitiation of ART or following the time-limited use of ART for prevention of perinatal transmission, especially when using ART regimens with a PI-based regimen or an integrase transfer strand inhibitor (INSTI).¹⁰ In ACTG 5227, 52 women who had previously received pregnancy-limited ART and who had no evidence of resistance were started on a fixed-dose combination of efavirenz/tenofovir disoproxil fumarate/emtricitabine once daily. After 6 months of therapy, 81% of these women achieved plasma viral loads that were below the limit of detection; the virologic suppression rate was not affected by the classes of previously used ARV drugs or whether women had received similar ART during one or more previous pregnancies.¹

Data from the French Perinatal Cohort were used to assess rates of virologic suppression among women who received PI-based ART; ARV-naïve women and women who had received ART during previous pregnancies to prevent perinatal transmission had similar rates of viral load suppression at delivery.¹⁰

ART is now recommended worldwide for women with HIV during pregnancy and throughout their lives.¹¹ Data have been reported regarding the benefits of ART for women with higher CD4 T lymphocyte (CD4) cell counts (>350 cells/mm³) and the potential harm of stopping ART after pregnancy in such women. **Data from the PROMISE study (HAART Standard version)** showed that women with CD4 counts ≥ 400 cells/mm³ who were randomized to continue ART postpartum had half the rate of World Health Organization stage 2 and 3 events as those who were randomized to discontinue ART.¹² Further, poor adherence was a common problem for women during the postpartum period in this study. Among women who were randomized to continue ART, 189 of 827 women (23%) had virologic failure. Of the 156 women with virologic failure who had resistance testing, **33% had at least one mutation** and 12% had resistance to their current ART regimen. Mutations and resistance occurred more often in women who experienced virologic failure on NNRTI-based regimens. However, most women did not have resistance to their current ART, which suggests nonadherence.¹² When counselling women about the benefits of taking ART during pregnancy and continuing for life, health care providers should emphasize the health benefits of ART and the importance of adherence during the postpartum period (see [Postpartum Follow-Up of Women Living with HIV Infection](#)).

Women may choose to discontinue ART for a variety of reasons, and the length of time off treatment prior to pregnancy may vary. A woman's HIV treatment history and all prior drug resistance test results should be taken into account when choosing ART regimens for pregnant women who have previously received treatment, even when the results of drug resistance testing performed during the current pregnancy are not yet available. Interpretation of resistance testing can be complex, because resistance testing is most accurate when performed while an individual is still taking ART or within 4 weeks of discontinuing treatment (see [Antiretroviral Drug Resistance and Resistance Testing in Pregnancy](#)). In the absence of selective drug pressure, resistant virus may revert to wild type; therefore, a negative finding does not rule out the presence of archived resistant virus that could re-emerge once ART is restarted (see [Antiretroviral Drug Resistance and Resistance Testing in Pregnancy](#)). Therefore, when selecting a new ART regimen, all information, including regimens received, viral response, laboratory testing (including HLA-B*5701 screening results), any tolerance or adherence problems, food requirements, concomitant medications, prior medical conditions, and the results of **all prior** resistance testing should be taken into consideration. In general, ART should be initiated prior to receiving the results of ARV drug-resistance testing, especially because longer durations of ART have been associated with reduced perinatal transmission rates compared to shorter treatment periods.^{13,14} ART should be modified, when necessary, based on subsequent resistance assay results. Careful monitoring of virologic response is essential.

A woman may restart a previous ART regimen that successfully suppressed her viral load if the regimen was well tolerated and there is no evidence of resistance to that regimen. Ideally, the regimen should also be currently recommended as first-line or an alternative regimen for initial ART in pregnancy (see [Table 4: What to Start](#) and [Table 5](#)). Drugs that are not recommended for initial use because of toxicity (stavudine, didanosine, treatment-dose ritonavir) **should not be used**; drugs that are not recommended for initial use because of concerns about viral breakthrough during pregnancy should also be avoided, if possible (see [Table 5](#)). Even experienced health care providers may have difficulty with the selection of appropriate ART for women who have advanced HIV disease, a history of extensive prior ART, or previous significant toxicity or nonadherence. In addition to obtaining genotypic resistance testing, it is strongly recommended that specialists in the treatment of HIV be consulted early in the pregnancy about the choice of a suitable ART regimen for such women.

If ART produces an insufficient viral response (e.g., <1 log drop over 2–4 weeks),¹⁵ repeat resistance testing, **including testing for resistance to integrase strand transfer inhibitors if indicated (see [Antiretroviral Drug Resistance and Resistance Testing in Pregnancy](#))** and assess medication adherence, food requirements,

and potential drug interactions (including relevant pharmacokinetic studies when available) to inform potential regimen changes. Consultation with an HIV treatment specialist is recommended (see [Lack of Viral Suppression](#)).

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